

Moncure Building
(Adams, Porter and Radigan Building)
Lawyers' Row Block
1415 N. Court House Road
Arlington
Arlington County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1275

HABS
VA,
7-ARL,
7-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HABS
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7-ARL,
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MONCURE BUILDING
(ADAMS, PORTER, AND RADIGAN BUILDING)

HABS No. VA-1275

Location: 1415 N. Court House Road, Arlington, Virginia

Present Owner: Arlington County, Virginia

Present Use: Demolished in June 1990

Significance: The Moncure Building was part of the Lawyers' Row complex, located on the east side of N. Court House Road across from the 1960 Arlington County Court House. The lawyers' (or courthouse) row represents a cultural and architectural heritage that is common throughout Virginia. Beginning in the eighteenth century, small service buildings such as these, subservient to the larger courthouse, were erected to accommodate lawyers and clerks. (See Lawyers' Row Block, HABS No. VA-1277)

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1936.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: This building occupied parts of lots 13 and 14, block 9, Fort Myer Heights; platted in Deed Book N4, page 50. Records are located in the Virginia Land Records office. The following is an incomplete chain of title:

Deed dated 2 December 1905: Frank Lyon and George H. Lyon to R. C. L. Moncure. Deed Book 113, page 6.

Deed of Trust dated 7 August 1907: R. C. L. Moncure and Irene W. Moncure to J. Donald Richards and Thomas R. Keith, trustees. Deed Book 116, page 59.

Deed dated 5 May 1952: Irene W. Moncure, widow, to R. C. L. Moncure (son), North W. Moncure, and Rosetta T. Moncure. Deed Book 1051, page 85.

Deed dated 18 July 1966: R. C. L. Moncure and Peyton S. Moncure to Harry W. Porter, Charles M. Radigan, and Thomas G. Mays, trustees for the 1415 North Court House Road Joint Venture. Deed Book 1627, page 230.

Deed of trust dated 12 March 1984: Allan R. Plumley, Jr., and Arthur L. Cline appointed as substitute trustees for Harry W. Porter and Charles M. Radigan, deceased. Deed Book 2129, page 1944.

Deed dated 29 May 1987: Allan R. Plumley, Jr., and Arthur L. Cline, trustees for the

1415 North Court House Road Joint Venture to Eldridge Ltd. Partnership. Deed Book 2278, page 1206.

Deed dated 6 September 1989: The Eldridge Ltd. Partnership to County Board, Arlington, Virginia. Deed book 2399, page 78.

5. Alterations and Additions: The following information was obtained from building-permit files:

3 July 1935: building permit.

19 November 1945: permit #1387 for a two-room addition.

5 February 1947: permit #2403 for addition.

18 April 1950: permit #5688 for addition and alterations as per plans.

21 April 1950: permit #5703 for a 4' x 8' interior furnace room.

20 October 1952: permit #9176 for a second-story addition.

12 January 1953: permit #9420 to remove partitions, install a 10" steel beam

16 January 1953: permit #9435 to remove front porch and repair roof.

8 September 1960: permit #19711 to scrape and replace slag roof.

28 September 1970: permit #2395 to remove an existing masonry wall.

15 November 1983: permit #2887 to remove and replace a slag roof.

B. Historical Context:

Richard Cassius Lee Moncure (died 1918), a judge, attorney, realtor, and editor of the Falls Church Monitor, acquired the land on which the Adams, Porter and Radigan Building sits from Frank and Georgie Lyon in 1905. The original portion of the building may date from the following year when the Virginia Realty Title Company was chartered, based "at Alexandria County Court House on the hill just above Rosslyn, Va." Moncure was secretary of the corporation and general manager of the Alexandria County division; George Rucker was treasurer. No written evidence exists to explain the history of this structure, but a 1907 view of the office, also advertising "Machen & Moncure Attys at-Law," shows a small, one-story, clipped-gable-front building with deep eaves and a porch. This may have be 1415-1/2 Sherman Avenue, seen on the 1936 Sanborn map, for according to oral tradition, the "Moncure Place"

was the oldest structure on the block and R. C. L. Moncure lived at this address.¹

Like other practitioners on the block, Moncure's son (1903-66+) was engaged in the insurance business since 1927 and the real estate business since 1937.² In 1936, the Moncure Building became the headquarters for the Adams, Porter, Radigan, and May law firm, which rented the structure until the 1960s; Allen C. Adams (died 1972) and Harry W. Porter, locally prominent attorneys, were the principals.

Adams represented Hopewell, Surry, and Prince Georges counties in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1929 and 1931. He also "appeared to be [Charles] Hosmer's campaign manager" in a race for Circuit Court judge that Hosmer won.³ Porter served on the Arlington County School Board and Board of Zoning Appeals in the 1940s. Porter was elected to the Arlington County School Board in 1940, 1942, and 1945 and served on the Arlington County Board of Zoning Appeals from 1939 to 1942. Both men were involved with many community activities and civic associations, such as the Lions Club. In addition, both men were on the board of directors of the First Federal Savings and Loan Association. Besides serving on its board, Porter served as the association's general counsel and Adams served as the association's president.

In 1910 R. C. L. Moncure sold the corner lot adjacent to the site of his building to George Rucker. The Rucker Building, housing the Geo. H. Rucker Company, was erected here ca. 1936 (see HABS No. VA-1274).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This one-and-one-half story structure is five bays wide by two bays deep. A large addition is built on the rear/east of the original structure; this two-story block is three bays wide and four bays deep. Collectively, it represents Colonial Revival styling combined with modern construction techniques.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair-good, prior to demolition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 6,606 square feet.

¹ Crandal Mackey, A Brief History of Arlington County (Falls Church: Newall Printing Co., [1907]), 37; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (New York, 1936).

² Richard Lee Morton, Virginia Lives (Hopkinsville, KY: Historical Record Association, 1964).

³ Phillips, 190-91.

2. Foundations: Concrete.
3. Wall construction: Concrete-block covered with stucco and painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing concrete-block.
5. Porches: The front door is approached from a semi-circular brick plaza. Three semi-circular steps connect this plaza with the sidewalk. Convex brick retaining walls at the ends of the steps give a terraced effect. A concrete stoop is located on the north end of the building between the original block and the addition.
6. Chimneys: One brick chimney is located at the junction of the east-facing gable and the peak of the main roof.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is in the center bay of the west facade: a panel door is flanked by sidelights and surmounted by four-light glazing above the transom. Ghosting for signage reading "Law Offices Adams, Porter & Radigan" is above these lights. The doorway is flanked by plain wood pilasters with plain bases and capitals. All other exterior doors are metal, set in metal frames. All doors and door trim are painted white. One door at the second-floor level of the east facade leads to a fire escape. A door at the bottom of the stairs on the north facade accesses the cellar. A second door on the first-floor, north facade, opens into the rear addition. A door to a storage area attached to the south facade is missing. It was set in a wood frame and appears to have been wood-panel (parts of the missing door are attached to the hinges and a padlock, which are still in place).
 - b. Windows: The windows in the original block are six-over-six-light double-hung sash, while those in the addition are tall vertical casements, and glass-block. The latter, on the plain rear facade, epitomize modern functionalism. The top of the windows on the first floor of the west facade are level with the bottom of the cornice. Sills throughout are composed of one course of vertical brick headers. The crown of the windows on the first floor of the main mass, except on the west facade, are segmentally arched.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof of the main block is a clipped end-gable form covered with slate shingles. The rear block has a shed roof covered with asphalt shingles. An east-facing gable in the east slope

is covered with slate shingles. The rear addition has a flat roof. The section of roof connecting the two sections is a shed with asphalt shingles. The roof of the west facade has a large triangular area between the two dormers which is covered with lighter-colored slate shingles; it looks as if a large front-facing gable has been removed. Such a gable would have matched the one to the rear of the original block. (This may have occurred in 1953 when a front porch was removed and a roof repaired. Two later permits were obtained for roof repair and/or replacement, in 1960 and 1983.)

- b. Cornice: The cornice consists of two boards. The frieze board is broad, flat and is surmounted by a narrow board, the lower edge of which has dentils cut out in it. This cornice treatment is found only on the main block.
- c. Dormers, towers: The two dormers on the west roof slope have clipped gable-front roofs covered with slate shingles. The dormer walls are also covered with slate shingles. Each dormer has one eight-over-eight-light double-hung sash set in a wood frame. Window frames and trim are painted white.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Cellar: Under the main block and west end of the addition.
- b. First floor: There are thirteen rooms and a bathroom on the first floor. The front door opens into a large room with a fireplace and a small closet. The stairs to the second floor originate at the east wall, south end of the room. A doorway north of the fireplace leads into a small hall (formerly a stair hall). At the north end of the room, a door leads into an office space. A door in the east wall of this room leads to a room adjacent to the old stair hall, which is also accessed from this second room. At the east end of the hall a door leads to the rear addition. The stair hall opens into a large library, which occupies the center of the addition. A deep, narrow room is entered from the west end of the library. An exit to the stairs is located in the south wall of this room. The library is flanked on the north and south by three rooms each. A bathroom is entered from the southwest corner of the library. An opening in the east wall of the library leads to a small hall and a solarium.
- c. Second floor: There are ten rooms and one bathroom on the second floor; five rooms each in the addition and original block. The stairs from the first floor terminate in a large open room that occupies

approximately one-third of the addition on the south end of the building. The east wall of the center bay, also one large open area, steps back into the building about 5'. The north end of the addition is divided into three rooms that are accessed from the center space but also have internal doors among the rooms. A bathroom is at the southwest corner of the center bay. A door in the center of the west wall leads to the original section of the building. The first space in the original building is a bathroom. A door in the west wall leads to the former stair hall. The opening for the stairs has been covered with plywood, however, the railing at the top of the stairs is intact. A small half-height door in the north wall provides access to the garret. A door at the west end of the stair hall leads to a small north-south hall, at both ends of which are rooms lit by dormers.

2. Stairways: One interior straight-run stairway is located at the south end of the building. A wood railing supported by metal brackets is attached to the north wall of the stairwell. This stair terminates at the second floor of the addition. A stair in the original block, of unknown configuration, was located in the hall to the east of the main room on the first floor. There is no evidence of the stair on the first floor, but upstairs the stairwell opening has been infilled with plywood. The wood railing that was at the top of the stair on the second floor is still in place; it has a rounded railing and square balusters.
3. Flooring: In the original structure, narrow pine boards over subflooring. In the addition, linoleum tile over concrete. On the first floor, the tiled surface is covered with an assortment of carpeting. On the second floor, the tile has been removed to reveal bare concrete.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Original block, first floor: In the main room and the old stair hall, the walls are plaster and painted a peach color. The ceiling of the main room is acoustical tile, while that of the old stair hall is plaster. The two rooms at the north end of this section and the long, narrow room east of the main space, have synthetic wood paneling on the walls and dropped acoustical tile ceilings. The ceiling of the main room and old stair hall are plaster and painted white.

Addition, first floor: The north, south, and west walls of the library are covered with dark-stained wood shelves from floor to ceiling. The ceiling is plaster painted white. The west wall of the solarium incorporates eight glass panels with a basketweave pattern set in a wood framework. The other walls of this room, as well as all rooms surrounding the library, are painted plaster. The room in the northeast corner of the addition has synthetic wood panelling. The bathroom has plaster walls and ceiling; the walls are covered with wallpaper.

Original section, second floor: All walls and ceilings in this part of the building, with the exception of the west wall of the north-south hall, are painted plaster. The west wall of the hall is painted plasterboard. Addition,

second floor: In the two large rooms, the walls are plasterboard painted white. Acoustical tile ceilings are used throughout. The bathroom walls are wallpapered.

5. Doorways and doors: All extant doors are wood panel. Doorways in the main room and stair hall on the first floor are flanked by reeded wood pilasters with plain bases and bull's-eye medallions at the capitals. The same door trim is found throughout the second floor of the original block.
6. Decorative features: The main room of the original block features a fireplace with a red-tile hearth. The firebox is plaster, painted black; although it may have functioned at one time, the firebox is very shallow and has been adapted for an electric "fire." The wood mantel is elaborately carved with bell flowers, floral swags, and dentils; it is painted white. A subtle segmental arch spanning the room from east to west divides the space into two sections. Most rooms on the first floor have baseboard, chair rail, and crown molding. In the main room, these are painted white. In the rest of the first-floor rooms, they are painted dark brown. Window trim throughout is painted white. The library and many of the rooms surrounding it have built-in book cases.

An interesting feature is an enclosed book lift, which runs between the first and second floors against the south wall; it appears to have been operated by pulling on weighted ropes. The second-floor room at the southwest corner of the original block has a built-in mail chute in the north wall.

7. Light fixtures: On the first floor, all artificial light, with the exception of the bathroom, is provided by fluorescent fixtures that hold two bulbs each. The bathroom has two incandescent fixtures. On the second floor, the original block contains incandescent fixtures, while the addition contains fluorescent fixtures.
8. Heating: An oil furnace is located in a 4' x 8' closet in the main room on the first floor.

D. Site:

1. General Setting: The building was on the east side of N. Court House Road across the street from the 1960 Arlington County Court House, between the Rucker Building (south) and the Jesse-Hosmer Building (north).
2. Landscaping, enclosures: Evergreen shrubs lined the foundation of the west facade. A small lawn exists between the front of the building and the sidewalk that parallels Court House Road. Two waterlogged strips of grass run between the Adams Building and adjacent structures. On the east side of the building, a ca. 5' wide strip of grass links the parking lot and the building.

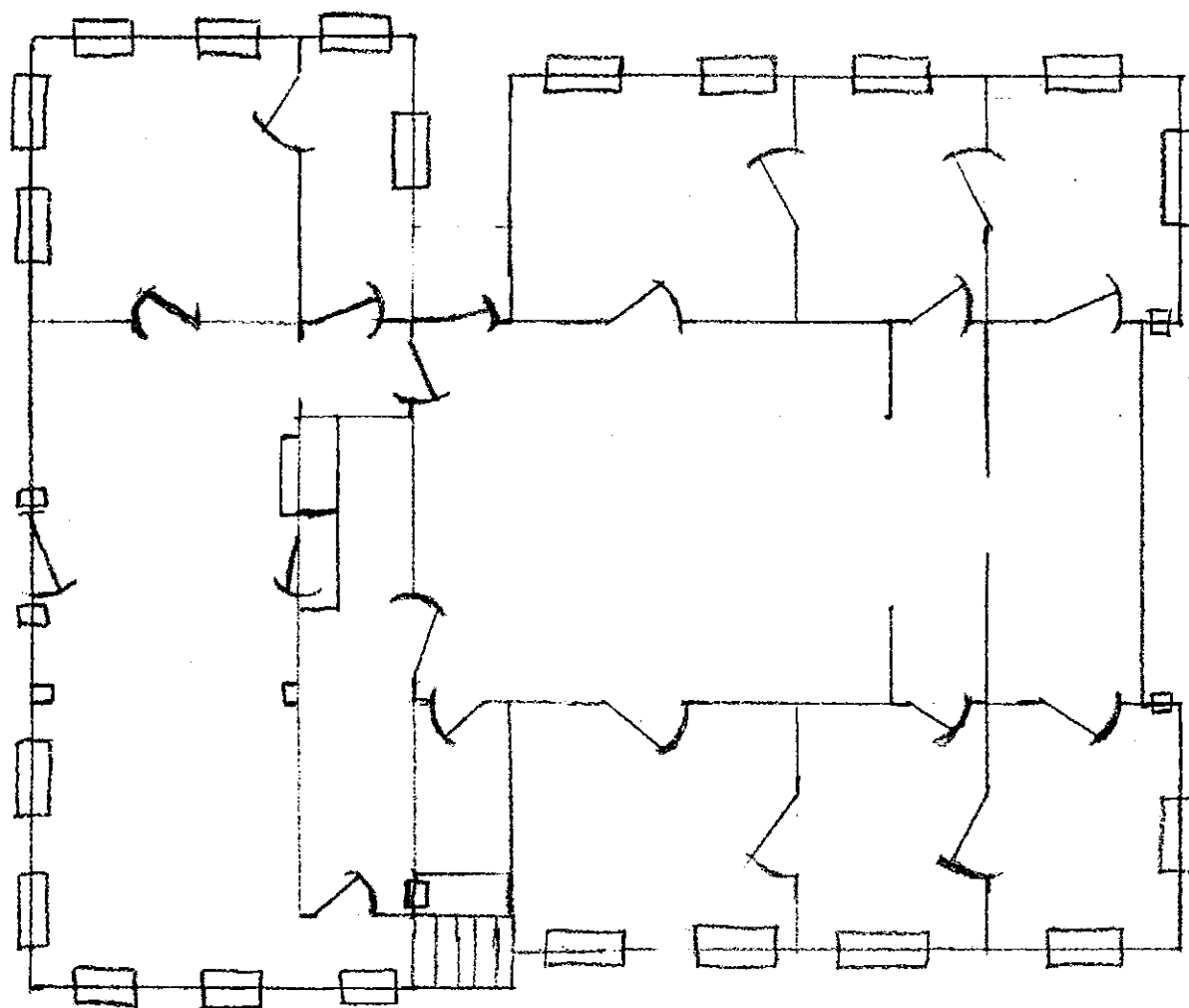
PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Primary and unpublished sources: For a complete bibliography, see this section of Lawyers' Row Block, HABS No. VA-1277.
- B. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: The photographic archives of the Arlington Historical Society may contain old views.

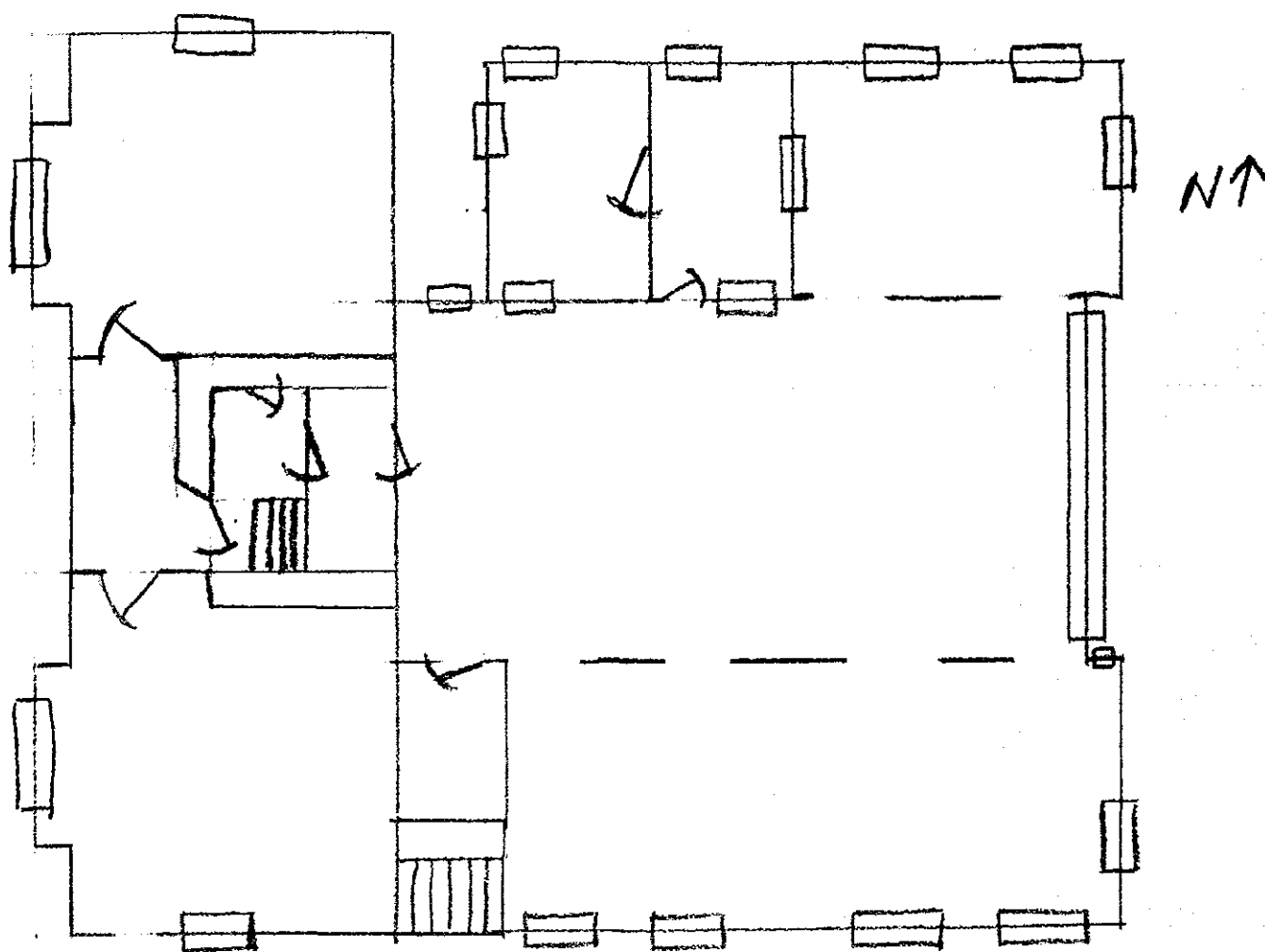
Prepared by:
Estella K. Bryans-Munson, Historian
Arlington Heritage Alliance
Spring 1990

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation project was coordinated by Sara Amy Leach for the Arlington Heritage Alliance Inc. with the sponsorship of the Bell Atlantic Charitable Foundation, to mitigate the impending loss of these historic Arlington County buildings. Estella Bryans-Munson served as project historian, and John Schwartz was the large-format photographer. All documentation is available from the HABS Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, at the Library of Congress, and the Virginia Room of the Arlington County Library.



Sketch plan, first floor. Not drawn to scale. By Bryans-Munson.



Sketch plan, second floor. Not drawn to scale. By Bryans-Munson.